

ASSOCIATION
105 EAST 22nd ST., NEW YORK CITY

HOUSING INVESTIGATION

NEWBURGH, NEW YORK

APRIL, 1913

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AMY WOODS, Investigator

BAD HOUSING PROMOTES

Industrial Inefficiency

Inebriety

Dependency

Poverty

Disease

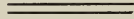
Death

Juvenile Delinquency

Debased Citizenship

Vice and Crime

Degeneracy of Race



The following volunteers gave valuable assistance:

MRS. JAMES WITHERS ELLIOTT

MISS EDITH ROCKWOOD

MRS. E. C. THOMPSON

MRS. W. T. WEBB

REV. ALFRED J. WILSON

MRS. ALFRED J. WILSON

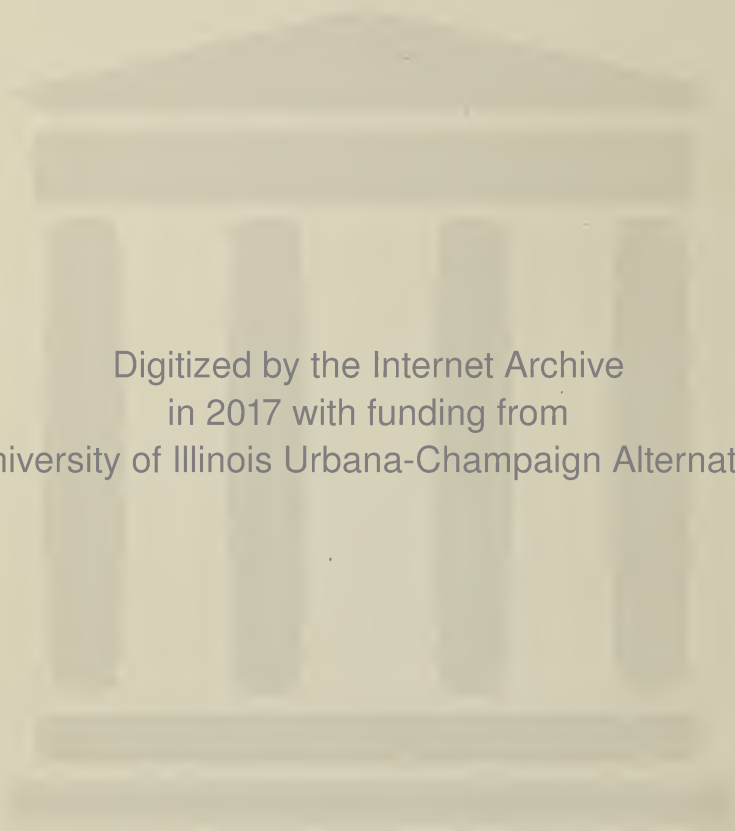
MR. FRANKLIN ZEIGER



WASHINGTON STREET.
Garbage Receptacles Do Not Beautify Newburgh Streets.



TYPICAL WORKINGMEN'S HOUSES.
Basements and Attics Used for Residential Purposes.



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Housing Conditions of Newburgh

MISS AMY WOODS.

SECRETARY NEWBURGH ASSOCIATED CHARITIES.

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The present housing investigation has been undertaken, not with the idea of covering the entire city of Newburgh, nor even a sufficiently large proportion of the territory to draw city-wide conclusions based on percentages. It is intended rather to show what may be found in certain sections of the city where the men and women of unskilled labor, whose wages seldom rise above \$12.00 a week, must seek homes. The field covered includes seventeen streets located in the six wards of the city. Individual houses were not singled out but all buildings on one side of certain streets for a given distance were visited. In this way the best as well as the worst conditions of that section were noted. One hundred and forty-seven houses were investigated and the living conditions of 276 families or 1357 individuals have been tabulated. In every case the statement of the resident interviewed was accepted in regard to the number of persons in the household, although there were evidences of additional boarders, who, if counted, would probably have raised the total above 1400. The number of individuals concerned represents roughly five per cent. of the population. Thirteen race or national groups are included: American, Italian, Irish, Negro, English, Slavish, German, Polish, Hebrew, Scotch, Syrian, Austrian and Norwegian. Over half the people visited were found in the first three groups: American (twenty-two per cent.), Italian (twenty-one per cent.), and Irish (thirteen per cent.).

HOUSING CREDITS.

After classifying and tabulating the findings, the various data showing favorable and adverse housing conditions were brought together. They may only be summarized here.

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On the credit side it was found that three-fifths of the families studied have at least one room that can be used as a common meeting place for the family's social life; more than half of the houses are either two-family or single detached houses; and of this number the largest part, forty-four per cent., represents single houses. For the whole of the city the proportion undoubtedly is still higher. Again, on the credit side it was found that in the sections of the city studied the greatest

part of the tenements do not run up over three stories, and that most of them are only two rooms deep thus giving favorable air and light possibilities. A large proportion of the houses have either basements or cellars, and for the most part the cellars are dry. Again, nearly two-thirds of the houses cover not more than half of the lot area, thus affording further access to outside light and air. Ninety-nine and one-half per cent. of the houses are connected with the city water supply, and in practically all cases there are opportunities for home gardens. Three-fourths of the houses are connected with the city sewers. Moreover the city collection of ashes is to be commended for its promptness and regularity.

HOUSING DEBITS.

On the other hand, offsetting these housing credits, were found a number of housing debits. That the lodger problem exists in the parts of the city covered by this study, is evidenced by the fact that over ten per cent. of the population were found to be adult boarders. For the most part the number of lodgers in each family were small, although two Italian families had as many as ten and twelve each. A few other cases chosen almost at random are illustrative. One is an American household consisting of a man, his wife, their ten children and one boarder. They were living in five rooms. The mother and father (who, incidentally, showed evidences of mental deficiency) slept in the kitchen. The four girls and six boys, ranging from four months to seventeen years of age, and one male boarder slept in the other four rooms.

Another case is that of an Italian household, numbering seven, four of whom, one woman and three men, were boarders and slept in one dark room opening only into the kitchen.

In another Italian family five lodgers were found who slept in a long narrow room just large enough for three double beds and with only a small window at one end of the room. The only door leads into a room which a man, reported to be "so sick as to be unable to work for these past two years", shares with his sister. The sister occupies a small alcove curtained off with a sheet.

Still another is the case of a widow with five children and four boarders occupying five rooms. The mother and three children sleep in the one bed in a room eight by nine

feet square, and the four men boarders occupy one room on the same floor.

These and the many other cases showed the boarder to be an important factor in room over-crowding with all its attendant physical and moral risks. In addition even where there is only one outsider in the family, he is a menace to family privacy which in many cases is already infringed upon because of small quarters. It was found, that two-fifths of the families had no extra room, but were obliged to center all their home social life in kitchen or bedroom. This fact doubtless figures among the reasons why so many of the young people after a long day in factory or store seek their recreation on the streets. Two-fifths of the buildings were in fair repair and one-fifth were in bad repair. Over ninety per cent. of the houses have no bath tubs and one-fourth are not connected with the sewers. A little more than one-fourth of all toilets are outside and four-fifths of these are not connected with the sewers, and seldom cleaned. Moreover, 191 families, or sixty-nine per cent. of all, used in-door and out-door toilets in common with other families and this undoubtedly contributed to the considerable number that were found in a bad state of sanitation and repair. Sixteen of the privy vaults were reported as nuisances. Whether inside or outside, toilets that are in bad repair or filthy condition are a menace to health and should at least be made wholesome. There were no privy vaults found which were not accessible to flies.

Again, attention was given to fire-escapes on three-story tenements, and it was found that of the sixty-three buildings inspected, none had means of escape from fire other than the ordinary wooden stairs.

LODGING HOUSES.

Lodging houses as such, were not investigated, but a number that were run across in the general study show them to be an important element of the local housing condition. One illustration may be cited. A five story building used originally for manufacturing purposes has been turned into a lodging house. Twenty-four beds were counted, there being two and sometimes three to a room. One toilet was found on the second floor off the hall; it was dark, badly ventilated, filthy, and served the whole house. An old fashioned iron sink in a room on the third floor supplies all the washing facilities. The

bed and bedding were filthy, the floor dirty, and the walls out of repair. There was one flight of stairs to each floor; and the halls were dark and narrow. Occupants of fourth and fifth floors must go to the roof and cross to other buildings in case of fire. The chimneys were out of repair. A family of seven were found to have paid seventy-five cents a night for the use of one room.

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SEWER PROVISION.

Finally, the older part of the city was found well covered by either public or private sewers. The number of private sewers is relatively large, but it is impossible to estimate them

HOUSING CONDITIONS DEBITS

Study of 276 Newburgh families (1357 persons)
in neighborhoods where unskilled workers must seek homes

Over 10% of the people are boarders

40% of families have no room for family social life

95% are without bath tubs

36% live in tenements

64% of houses in fair to bad repair

69% of families use toilets in common with other families

39% of inside toilets not in good repair

82% of outdoor toilets have privy vaults

200 manure piles (estimated) in densely populated districts

No fire escapes on tenements

closely, since a property owner may construct a sewer without notifying the city of his intention and thus no record is made unless a petition is received by the Board of Health to connect with the city sewer. In some instances where new streets have been laid through private property for development purposes, sewers have been laid by the owners which have not always been of a size sufficient for the territory which would eventually be drained therein. When these streets are accepted the city then carries the cost of repairs.

In the outlying sections of the city where future growth will naturally be, as manufacturing interests develop, there

are already by actual count 343 houses on streets without sewers. In ward five, 137 houses are located on ten streets which have no sewers. The dwellings have been put up at random and represent all types of houses ranging from a suburban cottage to brick tenement rows. The land is rolling and beautiful, with many natural advantages, and its development in the next ten years offers opportunities for filling the need of unskilled laborers for homes at fair rental. If the present illogical growth continues this section will add to Newburgh's housing problem, and will together with the present city dump, make a still more uninviting approach to Newburgh from the south.

HOUSING CONDITIONS CREDITS

Study of 276 Newburgh families (1357 persons)
in neighborhoods where unskilled workers must seek homes.

44% live in one-family houses

19% live in two-family houses

62% have buildings covering not more than $\frac{1}{2}$ the lot

99½% have city water

95% have opportunities for home gardens

75% of houses have sewer connections

Most of tenements are 3-story or less

Cellars usually dry

Ashes regularly collected

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.

The facts already cited make it fairly obvious that the first and most important housing need in Newburgh is a housing code. We should therefore recommend that some of the organizations of the city or the city itself continue the study of housing conditions and gather information on the best housing methods adopted in other cities, to the end that a housing code be secured either by Newburgh alone or in co-operation with the other third class cities of the state,—such a code as will conserve the good features of the present housing and



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head off any tendencies that may prove unwholesome. In this connection a phrase or two of a recent letter from John Ihlder, field secretary, National Housing Association, New York, is in point: "The charter, ordinances, plumbing code, sanitary regulations, etc. of Newburgh are fairly good, but they do not touch the big phases of the housing problem at all. What Newburgh needs is a housing code which will fill the gap left by its existing legislation. It looks to me like almost a virgin field."

Further suggestions which have developed as the findings have been studied, are :

I. The keeping by the city of a complete registration of all property owners and houses, with their assessed valuation in order that responsibility may be readily placed, and that comparison may be drawn from year to year in regard to the change of property, the increase in improvements and growth in building.

II. The placing of the construction and inspection of all sewers, both public and private, under the supervision of the city engineering department; and placing the construction and inspection of all cesspools and privy vaults, as well as the connection of houses with sewers, and the investigation of complaints, under the city health officer.

III. The changing from discretionary to mandatory the power of the health officer to order the abolition of all privies within a reasonable time on streets having public sewers; also the abolition of untrapped water closets and outdoor water closets which freeze up or become filthy and unsanitary.

IV. A yearly inspection by the Fire Department of all tenement houses within city limits and a record of all such houses filed by card system in the City Hall. This would supply information on the city's fire liabilities, and should be made the basis for enforcement of proper laws for adequate fire prevention and protection.

V. An investigation of lodging house conditions with a view to regulating their sanitary conditions.

VI. The encouragement of home gardens through some kind of organized effort; and perhaps, by the offering of prizes and the co-operative distribution of penny packages of seeds by private societies of the city.

To these we invite serious consideration.